TRANSCRIPT— MARY ELIZABETH COMPTON JEPSON

ELIADA HOME INTERVIEW

Interviewee: Mary Elizabeth Compton Jepson

Interviewer: Clifford Davids

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Transcriber: Pat Fitzpatrick

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Clifford Davids: ...7th of 1999, it's just after noontime. It's a beautiful sunny, cool, sort of a windy day out today. My name is Cliff Davids. Why don't we start off with just getting some basic information from you. Can you please introduce yourself to me?

Mary Elizabeth Jepson: Okay. I'm Mary Elizabeth Compton Jepson.

CD: Can you spell your last name for me, please?

MEJ: J-e-p as in Peter-s-o-n.

CD: Mrs. Jepson, can you give me your date of birth?

MEJ: 8/13/36.

CD: Ms. Jepson, I want to first of all thank you for coming here today and spending the time talking with us. We're going to be interviewing Ms. Jepson about her life here at Eliada.

Ms. Jepson, can you please describe the circumstances that brought you to Eliada initially?

MEJ: I was three weeks old when I was brought to Eliada. And I was, had very low birth weight and I was not expected to live. And so they put me in the nursery and I cried and cried and kept the other babies awake, kept the nursery workers awake, kept myself awake. And so Mrs. Compton

took me to her room, her own room, and put me in a drawer. And Mr. Compton was away at the time. And so soon she took me to the doctor and she said, "I would really like to, you know, take care of this child and keep her with me." And he said, "No, don't do such a thing, because she probably won't even live for a month."

But she kept me and when Mr. Compton came back from his trip, and came to her room in the big house, he said, "What this little girl doing in this drawer?" And she said, "Oh, that's the new baby here and she came while you were away and so I kept her here because she keeps crying in the nursery." But she said, 'The problem is I'm falling in love with her and I'd like to keep her." And he said, "Edith, I'm 61 years old and you're 55 years old. What are we going to do with a baby?" He said, "I think we better think about this and pray about it." And she said, "I already have thought about it and prayed about it." And he said, "Well, let's do so a little bit more" and she said, "Fine." And then he said, "We'll decide in a few days." So they thought about it and prayed about it some more and those few days passed and he said, "You know, I agree with you. I've fallen in love with her, too. She'll be ours."

And so that day they changed my name. I got a new mother, I got a new father, and I got a new name, Mary Elizabeth.

CD: Ms. Jepson, tell me what information you have about your natural parents, your natural birth parents.

MEJ: No, I don't talk about that. I know very little and what I do remains in my heart.

CD: Let's start off with your earliest childhood memories at Eliada. Tell me a little bit about what the place was like back then.

MEJ: It was a beautiful 400-acre farm that had lots of animals and lots of children. And, of course, this would have been--my earliest memories probably would not have been till around, I suppose 1940, when I was about four years old. And I guess my earliest memory is of running around in the large grassy areas that we had here. And another early memory would have been singing at chaplain services with all the kids.

CD: Describe physically what the campus looked like back then, as a child.

MEJ: Okay. We had the, what was called the big house, which was the large administrative building that had in it the offices. And the lower floor had a dining room and large living room and a nice large kitchen.

The second floor housed the babies, infants, and the little boys. And the third floor housed the teenage girls. And then there was the, what was called the little girls' building, which is now, I think, what they call the Allred building. And that housed on the upper two floors the little girls. And then on the lower floor, the basement, was the school, the first to the fourth grades.

And then we had the what was called the big boys' house, which was really for the teenage boys and the upper floor of that housed the teenage boys, I guess the upper two floors. And then the lower floor of that was the elementary school from grades five through eight.

CD: Where was the big house located?

MEJ: The big house was located next to the, what is now called the green house. The green house, at that point, was nonexistent.

CD: Describe the area between what is now Allred, and where the main building was, where now the green house is; was that just a treed area or--

MEJ: Grassy area, pretty much.

CD: Were there other parts of the campus, as well?

MEJ: Oh, yes. We had a big barn and we had a huge chicken area for hundreds and hundreds of chickens. And then we had areas for the horses and areas for the cows and the bulls. And up on one of the hills was what was called the cottage. And that's where Mother and Daddy and I lived. It was--they had just the one, I want to call it a nice house for a nuclear family. And the nuclear family was Daddy, Mother and me.

And then we would go down to the main campus, the main part of Eliada, on Sundays and on Thursday, for supper and prayer meeting. And, now, of course Mother went down every day to help with the children. Daddy went down every day to help with the, I mean to work in the office, and when I was school age I went down every day to go to school.

CD: Tell me about size of the class that you were in when you first started at, I imagine, kindergarten.

MEJ: No, we didn't have kindergarten. We just started first grade. And we had four rows of seats. This is a one-room school. We had four rows of seats. The first row we had the first grade, the second row was the second grade, the third row the third grade, the fourth row the fourth grade. It was very simple. And if there were too many first-graders, then they kind of spilled over to the row that was for the second-graders.

So I went to--I have always been a person who is very observant and I paid close attention to what was going on. And so I did this in first grade, I did this in second grade, and by the time I got to the third grade I had to pay attention well enough so that I knew all the work. And the teacher said to Mother and Daddy, "She's very bored. She knows all the work. I think this will be a waste of her time. I'd like to put her in fourth grade." And so they did.

CD: During those elementary school years, describe to me what a typical daily routine would be for you during the school year itself.

MEJ: Okay. We would, Mother and Daddy and I would get up about 6:30. We would eat breakfast about 7 o'clock. And then school would begin, I would walk down to school. Or more precisely, I would run to school, because I walked very few places. I preferred to run. I would run down to the school and then have school from, say, 9:00 to 12:00.

And at 12 o'clock the bell would ring, which meant it was time to have lunch. So then I would have lunch. I would either go home for lunch or else I would meet Mother in the dining room for lunch. And then I would play for a while.

Then after lunch I would go back to school until 3 o'clock. At 3 o'clock I got out of school and walked home. Rain, shine, snow, whatever, you walked. That was it.

CD: You had mentioned that the Comptons adopted you at a very young age. Tell me a little bit about your mother. What was she like, what kind of person was she?

MEJ: Oh, she was a very loving and dignified person, rather reserved. She had come from New York. Corning, New York, to be precise. She grew up--a lot of people don't know this. She grew up on a farm and her name was Edith VanDeusen. Her parents did not give her a middle name. They had 12 children, and by the time they got to her, I think she was seventh in line, I guess they felt they had run out of middle names, so they just gave her one name, Edith.

Anyway, their farm was adjacent to the Tom Watson farm, and as most people in the world know, Tom Watson was later to become the founder of IBM. So that's where she grew up. And she grew up in a little community called Painted--outside a community in Corning, New York, called Painted Post. And when she--she did not grow up in a Christian family but she was very ill as a child with throat problems. And the family doctor was, their community doctor was a Christian gentleman. And so he said to this family that he was always having to go out to, to take care of this sick child, "Why doesn't she come in and live with my wife and me in town, in Painted Post?"

And so it was agreed upon by the family that Edith would go, as a teenager, to live with this doctor and his wife, and kind of be a companion to his wife, which she was. But she was turned deeply in the Christian faith and made it possible for her, after she finished high school, to go to Cincinnati Bible College, in Cincinnati, Ohio, which she did.

And at Cincinnati Bible College there came one week to bring special messages a minister from North Carolina whose name was Lucius Compton. And there was no, as far as I have ever been given the impression, no any kind of love relationship there. She just admired his preaching and she was looking for a position after graduating from Cincinnati Bible College and so he said, "You know, I have this place in North Carolina and I desperately need workers. And I would just love it if you would come down and work with me." And so she did.

I need to be more precise. I don't think it was called Cincinnati Bible College. I think it was called God's Bible School. And then later the name, years later, I think it became Cincinnati Bible College. So that's how she happened to come to Eliada, was to be a helper to these children who desperately needed somebody, who needed a mother, these little young children who were, for all intents and purposes, they were waifs.

Because the babies, of course, had come from Faith Cottage. And any other children had sort of been taken off the streets because they were being neglected. And so here they came to Eliada where they were not being neglected, they were well cared for, they were loved. They were given clothing. They had three meals a day on schedule. And it just gives them an awful lot of stability, which every child needs for nurturing.

CD: Describe your mother to me at this point. Was she a large woman, a small woman?

MEJ: No, she was not small. She was of medium height, very dignified, with a ready smile. Not outgoing as you are probably aware of the ying and the yang of couples. He was the outgoing extrovert, never met a stranger. And she was more reserved, in the background, the strength of Gibralter. And that's why it was a terrible shock to her as I matured and got older, she did not have my stubborn streak in her, and I was terribly strong-willed. And I, upon occasion, brought her to tears with my terrible will. And she would pray long and hard about getting her strength to work with this child.

CD: Now, you mentioned at Miss Edith was married. Could you tell me a little bit about her husband?

MEJ: Okay, her husband was Lucius Compton. He was tall and handsome with beautiful, beautiful white wavy hair, by the time I met him. Of course, he used to have other--I guess it was red hair when he was younger. But by the time I came long, he had beautiful white hair, which he parted in the middle. And which, after supper up at the cottage, on many occasions, he would allow me to get a comb--I think it kind of relaxed him, to get a comb and comb his hair in all kinds of different ways. And he would just sit there and almost go to sleep with my combing his hair.

They loved each other deeply. Many couples have pet names for each other. His pet name for her was Angel. He felt that she was God's angel for him, because she was a very willing person, very strong person, in her personality. Not being extroverted, but as far as being a person of strong integrity. And he could depend on her word. If she said, "I will do this," he never had to worry about it ever being done. It was done. I never heard him

once ask her, “Edith, have you done this?” Because she was totally, 100 percent, dependable. It was amazing.

And that’s why she and I clashed when I was a child, because I would try to persuade her to change her mind about something I wanted to do and that’s where, if she felt it was not right for me to go do something that I wanted to do, she would just say “No.” And then I got a sinking feeling, because I knew full well I could never persuade her to change her mind if she thought it was the thing to do.

DC: I’ve heard that Mr. Compton was a powerfully built man. He was a strong man.

MEJ: He was a strong man. He wasn’t, he was not overweight, he was just very well built. And he was very active and so he wore so many hats, so many different shirts, so that he would walk around the farm. During the war, if he was short of help, he would easily get up on a tractor and go plow fields. And maybe then the next week he would be before hundreds of people preaching. And every Sunday morning he would preach at the chapel services here, that we had on campus. He was very well beloved and he kept himself in good health.

DC: I understand in his earlier days he worked as a cook and, I understand also, that he enjoyed to cook into his later years, as well? Is that the case?

MEJ: The only time I ever saw him cook was in the summertime we would go up to a mountain cabin that he owned near Brevard. His cabin had been given to him, or the property had been given to him by a donor friend of Eliada. And this cabin was built, and so he would take the--he and Mother and I would go with the teenagers, teenage girls, up

to the cabin for like a week at a time. And at the cabin the roles were reversed. At home, Mother did the cooking at the cottage. Daddy never cooked. At the cabin, Daddy always made pancakes for breakfast. It was wonderful. I don't ever recall seeing him cook at Eliada.

DC: I also understand he was a great lover of music.

MEJ: Oh, he loved music. He could direct music. He had a beautiful voice. Now, I'm not talking about beautiful in the sense of operatic voice. No, no. But a good strong singing voice. And he would always open up the prayer meetings on Thursday night at Eliada with singing. Not singing a solo, but group singing. And whereas he could have easily have been a soloist, he was never one to put himself forward and say, "Okay, now, I will sing the second verse," although he was certainly capable of doing so.

DC: Did he ever talk about his trip to Palestine, which he took earlier in the century, back in the early 1900s, to you?

MEJ: Oh, yes. He had pictures, some pictures of himself being--he and Mr. Calman(?), who was a good friend of his, went to Israel together. He always spoke of it as the holy land. I mean, that's just the way he referred to it. And so he and Mr. Calman went to the holy land together and they baptized each other in the Jordan River. And they thought that was very special. And, of course, it was. I mean, you know, who else--I mean, not very many people in America have been baptized in the Jordan River. And so they were.

And my question for you is, have you ever heard about his barely missing the Titanic?

DC: This is not a story I've heard before. I do know that in 1912 he did travel to Palestine. And when I heard that date, it of course rang a bell, but I didn't realize there was a connection. And feel free to tell me about that, if you like.

MEJ: Okay. On their way home from Palestine, someone--or from the holy land, as he always said. First of all, he had a magnificent time in the holy land. I think that gave him extra surety, gave to him extra feeling and appreciation for the Biblical stories, because he had been there. He had been in the Mount of Olives, so he knew about Christ's struggle in Gethsemane. He had been to some of the other areas of Israel, and so he could identify with those stories of the Old Testament, which he loved so much. And he loved the Bible, both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Well, on their way back from the holy land, he was asked to preach a series of sermons in London, which he agreed to do. And these preaching, mission as they called it in those days, and sometimes people still refer to it in some circles as a preaching mission. In London, this was so well received that although someone had given him--imagine this--given him a ticket on the Titanic, which he had. And he had this ticket to sail on the Titanic. His preaching mission had been so well received that he was asked to stay for two more weeks and extend this preaching mission, which he did. And thereby missed the Titanic.

And one of our sons, Paul, said to me, "Mother, can you imagine what a ticket to the Titanic would be worth today?" But, of course, no one has this ticket to the Titanic, which he never used. And so, of course, this was well beyond--this would have been 24 years before I was born, so I of course know nothing of this except through the grapevine,

or historical recollections by other persons. But apparently when the news came to Eliada that the Titanic had sunk, there was great consternation and, of course, weeping and, you know, concern all around, because they thought that he had been on the Titanic. Because they knew he was scheduled to sail. And, of course, communications being what they were in those days, they waited for days and days to learn--in fact, I think it was probably a week or 10 days later that they learned that he had not, in fact, been on the Titanic.

Now, my husband and I were recently, about three weeks ago, we were in Halifax, Nova Scotia. And the bearing this has to do with what I have just mention is the fact that we went to the museum of the Titanic in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where we learned that the people who survived the Titanic were brought to New York. The people who had died were all taken to Halifax, because America was so traumatized by it and New York City was so traumatized by what had happened, that they did not want the dead being brought to New York. At least this is what we were told at the museum. Not told, but this is what we read in their artifacts.

But it sort of gives you the chills to look at the pictures of the Titanic and some of the artifacts that they have from it and realize that Eliada would never have continued after 1912 had he gone down with the Titanic. It was really a miracle.

DC: Tell me a little bit about your father's, any conversations that you might have had with Mr. Compton, with your father, about the tabernacle, the historical tabernacle that's built into the mountain.

MEJ: He never talked--I don't ever remember him talking about seeing the tabernacle. He preached in it. He did things in it. Nowadays, we have so much security in our country. I

mean, there are no wars going on, there are, you know, money is available and, for the most part, people are not in great need. In the 1940s, it was totally different. We were at war and people simply just did not have time to talk so much. And so, if you can imagine that here he is trying to keep together--during the war there were at least 90 children here on a regular basis. There was no state funding or anything like that. Trying to keep together a 400-acre property, 90 children, provide for them and a staff, hundreds of chickens, pigs, cows, Guernsey cattle and so forth, and people just didn't sit down and say, "Well, now, let's see. This is the way it was 25 years ago," which we sort of have the luxury now of looking back and ruminating on all these things.

In Eliada in those days, we did not have a large staff, and so he was the general administrator of the place and he preached on Sundays always to us, and was responsible for going out on trips and trying to generate income, and never knowing when they would open the front door to go get the mail or something and there would be a baby on the front door.

So he didn't talk about, he didn't talk an awful lot about I, I, I. It was, "God has done this for us. We must be thankful." And so, as far as the tabernacle was concerned, it was used for ten days in August every year. And I remember pictures of it being used by people who came in horse-drawn buggies and then in later Model T's and so forth. But he never talked about really the history of it. As far as I was concerned, it was just there.

DC: Was the tabernacle used for any other functions, other than the camp meetings?

MEJ: Nothing that I ever recall. Absolutely nothing. Upon occasion when we would go with the children and sometimes I would join them, we'd go for walks up on the

mountain, we were given permission to go on a little side trip and go down into the tabernacle. And when we were allowed to actually run along through there, which we were never allowed to do during camp meeting. At camp meeting it was a place of worship and you were supposed to behave yourself. But after camp meeting was over, I recall that we used to--of course, we'd have to clean it up and people would leave Kleenex or gum wrappers or whatever on the cement of the tabernacle and we'd go along and pick it up and hopefully find a dime or a penny in the process, which I have carried on. I still have that practice. If I see a dime on the ground, I pick it up.

DC: How would you enter the tabernacle?

MEJ: Oh, my goodness. It was possible to enter the tabernacle from any direction. The proper way to enter the tabernacle was through these giant doors--that had on two ends of one side had giant doors.

DC: As you were facing the tabernacle from behind?

MEJ: No, as you were facing the tabernacle from the front.

DC: From the road, were there still doors on the left side or the right side of the structure? If you were on that road, and you were looking at the tabernacle, looking at the wooden planks that created the backdrop--

MEJ: Yes.

DC: --were those doors on your left or on your right.

MEJ: Okay, what I'm saying is, in the first place you would be unable to see the tabernacle from the road. The tabernacle was not entered from the road. And in the summertime, because of all the overgrowth--as I recall, it was impossible to even see the tabernacle. There was another road that went from the main campus up through, toward the tabernacle, and then you could cut off to the right a little bit. And all this was always, during camp meeting time, covered with sawdust, fresh sawdust. It was nice and clean. And so then these two huge--really, one would not call them doors. They were more large openings, like you would think of a huge opening in a barn. So they weren't convention doors.

But between any of the pillars of the tabernacle one could enter. And although the tabernacle camp meeting services customarily drew a lot of the mountain people, the people had manners enough to know that once the service began--this was never mentioned, but I always observed this--once the services began, no one ever entered those doors, those openings. They would go up the hill a little bit and enter from between some of those pillars in the tabernacle, so that they would not draw attention to themselves away from the speaker, as they made their entrance.

CD: The speaker's platform, it appears to be somewhat elevated off the ground.

MEJ: Okay. There were two lefts. First of all, if you could think of the cement in the tabernacle, sloping down from the back toward the front, if one then--if one started from the back of the tabernacle, on that slope, and walked down the aisle, then about I would say maybe 10 feet from the last remaining pew forward would be covered with straw. Then up from that straw about, I would say, maybe 24 inches, was a platform that had

been constructed of wood. And on that first level of the platform area was the pulpit from which whoever was speaking spoke. And there was sufficient room for the chairs, several chairs.

Then up from that, oh, I'd say maybe 7 feet above that, was another platform at the top, which was much larger, which could accommodate--it didn't at the time, but it could well have accommodated several pianos. It accommodated, as I recall, one or two pianos and then it was large enough for a small choir to be up there. And the purpose for that was so that the people way in the back, even though you [?] up the slope, the people way in the back could be able to see whoever was playing the piano. And the song leader, as I recall, stood up here. So everyone could see the song leader. And camp meeting consisted of, I mean the speaker part, consisted of in the morning there would be a Bible study. I'm not exactly sure on the times, but say approximately say 9:30, would be a Bible speaker. And they would talk on--they would read Bible message on, say, the Old or the New Testament that was very directly oriented toward the part of scripture this person was going to address. And these people were not local people. He brought people from across America to do this-- good, excellent Bible teachers.

And then there would be a break and so people had time to go back and freshen up or get a cup of coffee or whatever they wanted to do. And then at 11 o'clock, as I recall, the preacher for the morning would hold forth. And that preacher might be Daddy or it might be some other preacher. And then after that there was lunch.

And then in the evening, there was always another speaker, preaching going on. So first was Bible study, the second, as I recall, was topical. And then at night it was always just

sure preaching. And it was at the 7:30 services at night in the tabernacle when people from the community came. But for the morning part, people would come from various parts of America. They would come from New York, Illinois, wherever. And just spend ten days.

There was no charge for the camp meeting, whatsoever. And you never knew how many people exactly were coming. As a homemaker, I cannot imagine having to cook for, you know, two or three or four hundred people and not even know how many to expect.

CD: What was the role of the children at Eliada with the camp meetings?

MEJ: Okay. Their primary role was to--well, for the teenagers, the primary role, before camp meeting began, was to get the cottages ready. Now, this was, of course, after the cottages existed. Years and years before that, it had just been tents. But then, by the time I came along, there were cottages that had been constructed. And so the role of the--the younger children had no role whatsoever, as far as preparation. The older children, the older girls, primarily got it ready with the older boys helping some with the lifting of mattresses and so forth. And the mattresses were stored in a--there was a what we call a dormitory/dining hall area, which is no longer in existence. It fell apart. The lower level was the dining hall and the upper level was for dormitory rooms and storage rooms.

CD: And this dormitory area and dining hall was located just below Mr. Humphries old house; is that correct?

MEJ: I don’t know about an old house. I’m not aware of that. I mean, there’s a brick house now where the director lives. But that’s nowhere near where the dormitory/dining

hall was. The dormitory/dining hall was not too too far from where the tabernacle now sits, or the remains of the tabernacle. Yes.

CD: Was there a storage area located underneath the taller platform of the tabernacle?

MEJ: Yes. Yes. As far as I recall, that's where folding chairs were placed.

CD: Now, you had mentioned earlier there was a sloping concrete base--

MEJ: Yes.

CD: --where people would sit. Did they have benches, did they have chairs? What types of arranged seat arrangements where the camp meetings were located in?

MEJ: Okay. The seating arrangements were benches which were, to put it mildly, not overly comfortable. They were just benches. Now, they had backs, these benches had backs. By the way, the purpose for the straw down front was so that after the preaching went on and the preacher would feel it incumbent upon him to--and by the way, I don't say him or her because in those days there were very few women preachers--the preacher would say, you know, "I've preached the word of God and now I invite you to come forward and kneel in this straw and confess your sins to God. And say 'I want to lead a different life.' Now, who will come forward? Now, as people come forward, let us sing 'Just As I Am.'"

CD: There were a number of small wooden cabins, I mean four altogether, that were located in the vicinity of Compton Cottage?

MEJ: No. No.

CD: Could you tell me where those log cabins were up there?

MEJ: Okay. Sometimes people think now, because some of these cottages have been moved or were moved in subsequent years after camp meetings stopped, that they were always located up there. Not so. These cottages, little cabins, were quite a way--they were way down the hill from what's now called the Compton Cottage. And initially, so that people did not have to stay in tents, they constructed several of these cottages, cabins, on one side and complete with bathrooms and showers and I think some of these--several of those cabins were dormitory style, so they could accommodate several people on one floor. And the trick was to get to camp meeting early enough so that you could request that you have a cabin with just two people, because that would be preferable. And the first cabin on the left was always reserved for my father's family. It was not large, but--I mean, the family was large but the numbers of people who came and the cabin itself was not large. But we always knew that Uncle Tom, his brother Tom's extended family, some of them would come for a few days and then maybe they would decide to stay for the whole time or they would leave and other members of the family would come. That was Uncle Tom's cabin.

Then a few years later, or many, many years later, on the other side of the road of the campground camping area, over near the dining hall, they built four or five additional cabins. And those were called the new cabins. And so you had the old cabin side and you had the new cabin side. And prior to camp meeting, the whole area was filled with--not filled but had fresh sawdust spread so that people had the feeling that people had thought ahead.

CD: The area where now, apparently, the residential cottages are--

MEJ: Yes.

CD: --before those cottages were built in the mid sixties, what was that area used for?

MEJ: It was just open space, what we call now where I live in Pennsylvania, open space and some of it was, like where this building currently is now, it was woods. And then between here and where Eliada Home Road is, right up there, there was a very nice log cabin that had been built. And that housed one of the workers who worked on the cabins. And then there was, closer to the campus, what is now the main campus, there was another older structure where another person who worked here lived with his family.

But the cottages for camp meetings were well away from the Compton Cottage. The closest structure to the Compton Cottage was the tabernacle.

CD: In 1945, when World War II finished up, you were approximately nine years old.

MEJ: Yes.

CD: Do you remember the end of the war?

MEJ: Oh, yes, I remember the end of the war, because during the war we would have blackouts. Even here up in the mountains, we had blackouts. And when the air warning signal rang out, we knew you just turned off all the lights until you heard the all-clear signal. And here at Eliada, we even had for a time some German soldiers. They were provided here by the government. Now, I'm not talking about soldiers, plural, to the tune

of ten or twelve. We had a few, so maybe four at the most, soldiers. And they did not come in contact much with the children and worked out in the fields.

CD: Are you referring to prisoners of war? German soldiers who were captured?

MEJ: Yes. Yes. That's right. Uh-huh. Because, you see, the farmhands, all those who were able-bodied farmhands had been drafted. If they had not volunteered, they had been drafted. And so when you have 400 acres and you had a lot of it in farmland, then you've got to have somebody to help. And so, I don't know what connections were made. But now these prisoners of war did not, they did not stay on the campus. They just came. They did not eat with the children or anything like that, and come in contact with them. I think maybe I just saw one or two of them out in the field and I was always interested in language, and so I would try to get them to each me German words.

CD: Tell me about, as a child, how you remember difficulties that Reverend Compton faced during the second world war in terms of providing for Eliada, in terms of providing food, having enough money to buy needed things for the campus.

MEJ: These were something that was never discussed. As far as I was concerned, the watchword was "God will provide." I never heard him say, "You know, I'm really concerned about this," ever.

CD: I have read many many instances where Reverend Compton saw a need [....]. Tell me, can you expound or expand a little bit on that faith and how it's possible that he was able to build this campus on faith alone?

MEJ: Okay. If he were here today, he would be the first person to say, "I did not build it. God built it." And he talked with God as if God were a friend that he had known all his life. For him, God was not some ethereal being who was out there. God was someone who walked with him, who talked with him on a daily basis. And Daddy and Mother both did what I call practiced what they preached. And they would--

END OF SIDE A.

BEGINNING OF SIDE B.

CD: Today is October 7th, it's the second side of the tape that we are currently using.

Ms. Jepson, would you kindly continue with your talking.

MEJ: Okay. Mother and Daddy practiced what they preached. There was a separate room set aside in what was called the big house, the old administration building. And the only purpose for that room was prayer. It was called "the prayer room." And the only thing that was supposed to go on in that room was the reading of the Bible and prayer. It was a lovely room. Not beautifully furnished but nicely furnished. It had a fireplace, it had a small rug in it and several chairs. And these several chairs, as I recall, had padding so that if one wanted to kneel down and pray, kneel on the rug and pray, your elbows would not get sore as they leaned on the chair. And so he would call the staff together. It may have been on a daily basis. If not on a daily--I think it was on a daily basis. After the children went to school, or it may have been on a weekly basis. Anyway, after the children had all gone to school, then the staff was supposed to meet Mother and Daddy in the prayer room, where they would bring to God the prayers and the needs of the campus, of the

home. We never called it the campus. We always called it “the home,” because it was known as The Eliada Home for Children.

And they would have a prayer list and then in the morning, again going on this faith basis, in the morning, after the children all ate breakfast, you didn’t just eat breakfast and then say “Thanks for the breakfast, see you later, I’ve got to go to school, bye.” There was a 30-minute time for what was called devotions, where one of the staff members gave a small Bible lesson and prayer. And they might have a little bit of singing. And the goal was to connect with God and then go about your daily business, either for the teenage girls, it would have been doing the dishes before they go off to school, and for the younger children to get ready for school.

Now that would be on a daily basis. Then on a weekly basis the needs were brought to God in prayer meeting. This was for everybody, all the children and all the staff. And this was conducted on Thursday night after, immediately following supper, and it was held in the dining hall. And after supper, we would all scoot our chairs back and we’d pass out hymn books--little paperback hymn books for the people who could read and, if there were enough, fine; if there weren’t, you were supposed to listen and memorize the words.

CD: Ms. Jepson, we’ve gone approximately 45 minutes into the interview now. We can continue on. I would gladly like to do that. If you have another appointment, we can continue at another time.

MEJ: Okay, let me just finish this one thought. The third way that they brought the needs of the home in prayer to God was on Sunday, when we had chaplain services, every

Sunday morning. And everyone, all the children and all the staff would gather in the third floor of what is now called Green Cottage, and we would have chaplain.

But Daddy never talked about, “You know, I’m really worried about this, or really concerned about that.” He felt that God would meet the needs. And God honored his faith in amazing ways. There were times when we would wonder, you know, “What are we going to do for fruit for the winter?” And like during the war, you just don’t--especially during the war, you just don’t go out and buy fruit and can it. And Daddy would pray that someone would provide. And all of a sudden, here would come a truck--and it gives me the chills to think about it still. A truck would drive down the road. I mean, a huge farm truck, full of peaches. And say, “Okay, Brother Compton, here, I want to give you some peaches.” And after a few years, it just kind of developed into a habit and we discovered there was this man in South Carolina who had this huge peach farm, peach orchard. And he would bring us, you know, just a load of peaches. Of course, then it was full speed ahead for the teenage girls to peel the peaches and can the peaches and store the peaches in the basement so you would have peaches for the winter.

And the same thing would happen like with potatoes. Although they did raise potatoes on the farm, they needed additional foods and people would drive up and just say, “Here’s a load,” of whatever. And it was kind of a mutual thing. Daddy honored God by having faith and God honored faith by providing. And Daddy did the same thing with the children. If someone was--he never turned a child away. And that’s how things got to be kind of out of hand. Not out of hand, but how the population of the children grew in numbers, grew so tremendously during the war. Because I remember one man was drafted in the war, he had six children. Six. And his extended family was not capable of

taking in all of these children, even if they farmed them out two, two and two. And his wife could not provide for them, and so he talked to Daddy and Daddy took in these six children. And he would do that time and time again. If someone knocked on the door and said, “I cannot provide for my family.” Then he would say, “God has provided and here you are.” Everything was not perfect but he spent his life and Mother spent her life trying their best to provide for these homeless children. And the world is better as a result. Because most of us have turned out quite--I mean, very good. I mean, as far as I know, no one who was ever brought up at Eliada has committed a major offense against society.

Okay, go ahead.

CD: There’s a phrase called Second Generation that was used in my work with the Shore[?] Foundation, and it referred to the children of the survivors. And I’m finding that the same phrase can be used here, in terms of talking about the children that passed through Eliada, because on the whole, from what I’ve heard, those children sound like they ended up with a good set of values and they have all gone on to become parts of their community that their parents and Eliada can be proud of. So there’s a similarity in that.

MEJ: Yes.

CD: Would you like to continue on?

MEJ: Just for a short time. That’s fine.

CD: How long was your stay at Eliada?

MEJ: Okay. I came in 1936. Daddy died in 1948. And in 1949, Mother became very ill and the doctor--unknown to me, the doctor thought that she probably would not survive, would not live. And so the doctor here in Asheville said, “Where are the closest relatives that you have where you could go and, you know, feel happy?” And her closest relatives were in New York. However, New York, Mother was getting on up in years then. And New York would not have been conducive to her health, she didn’t feel, and her next closest relatives were in California. And so in January of 1950 Mother and I went to California. However, we continued to come back to Eliada every summer.

CD: Did Mr. Compton remain active at Eliada until his passing on?

MEJ: Yes. For the most part. In April of 1948, prior to his death in December, he went to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, for a series of preaching services. And, as it turns out, Lancaster is only an hour counting to Amish country, to where I currently live. And he was in Lancaster and he was not staying in a hotel and he was guest of the person, I guess, who had invited him to preach at his church for a week of special services. And Daddy got up--by then, you see, he would have been 72--and he got up during the night to go to the restroom. And, as you know, sometimes when you’re in a strange house, a strange motel, whatever, you open the wrong door. It was dark, he opened one door and thought he was going into the bathroom and instead he fell down the stairs, a set of stairs into the basement.

Now, here is a big man weighing probably over about 200 pounds, maybe a little over 200 pounds by then, in the middle of the night, falling in a basement. He cut his head a little bit and had to have stitches. He came home. He was never himself after that. Never

completely recovered. That had a profound effect on me. And to this day, that I go anywhere strange, I take a night light with me. And when I first married my husband, he said, “Why in the world do you always carry these night lights when you go anyplace? Why is it that during the night when we are here at our own house where we know where every door is, you insist on having a light on?”

And I say, my answer was to him then, “I don’t want the same thing to happen to either of us that happened to Daddy.” And so we always, wherever we go and in our own house, we have a light on during the night. So when we get up, we know where we’re going.

So then in the fall--then Daddy started having indigestion, I noticed, somewhat. And then in the fall, he got progressively worse. And in November they decided that they would operate, because he was getting so progressively worse. And, of course, in those days, you know, they didn’t have endoscopies and all these things that they can perform now on people, and blood tests that show everything, so much that’s going on with you. And so he was operated on for cancer and there was massive cancer in his stomach and they could do nothing but sew him up. And within a week he was gone.

So until I suppose late, he was--in the middle of the fall, he was very active. But clearly slowing down somewhat.

CD: I know we have a limited amount of time so I would certainly like to continue the interview at a later date, but just to finish off the interview, I need to get some personal information. You mentioned that you got married. Would you please give me the name of your husband and the date of the marriage.

MEJ: Okay. I'm married to Alvin Sayer Jepson. He goes by the name of Al. And we were married December 21st, 1957. And I chose the day of the month, the 21st. I could have chosen Friday night the 20th, but I chose the 21st because Daddy's birthday was the 21st. However, his birthday was the 21st of April. Still, I wanted that connection of the same day of the month. So that's why I did that.

CD: Do you have children?

MEJ: Yes, we have two sons. We have a son by the name of Paul Alvin Jepson, who is named after my husband and his father, Alvin. And we chose the name Paul for the apostle Paul. And we have a son John Compton Jepson. The name John is for the President of Fuller Seminary from which my husband graduated, in California. And the Compton is, of course, for Daddy.

CD: Do you have grandchildren?

MEJ: I have one grandson. His name is Garrett, Garrett Forester Jepson. And he is two years old and a humdinger. And Garrett is so special to me. Of course, my children are, too, because they are the only connection that I have with my past, as far as biology is concerned. When I touch them, there's that extra connection. These people are related to me. And that's very special.

CD: If you don't mind, to finish off the interview, would you just give me a last thought about your time at Eliada.

MEJ: Yes, I think my--what I learned here that has been enduring for me is that faith in God works.

CD: Ms. Jepson, thank you for taking the time. I appreciate it. I know you must be very busy today and hopefully we'll continue this at a later date.

MEJ: Thank you. I've enjoyed it. Cheers.

END OF INTERVIEW.